On Today's Editorial Page
Farber Case And The Public
Editorial
Pope Paul VI
Editorial

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Charges House Panel Hired

By JO MANNIES
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

The attorney for James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., says House investigators hired a Black Jack man to spy on Ray's brother.

And, said attorney Mark Lane, investigators for the House Select Committee on Assassination then gave the "spy" answers — some false — for his official testimony.

Lane was in St. Louis on Monday for something of a three-ring circus of disclosures and allegations. In addition to the charges about spying, Lane:

— Accused the committee staff of using illegal means to gain evidence, including wiretapping and thefts, all as part of a "conspiracy" to prevent a fair investigation into King's death.

— Engaged in a mild shoving match with a New York Times reporter and accused the Times of being an unwitting "transmission belt" for false disclosures about the King murder. Lane maintained that committee investigators had intentionally leaked the information to the Times to discredit Ray's contention that, despite his guilty plea, he is innocent.

Lane said he decided to make his allegations public because, "Members of Congress have not the faintest idea that they are being betrayed by their own staff."

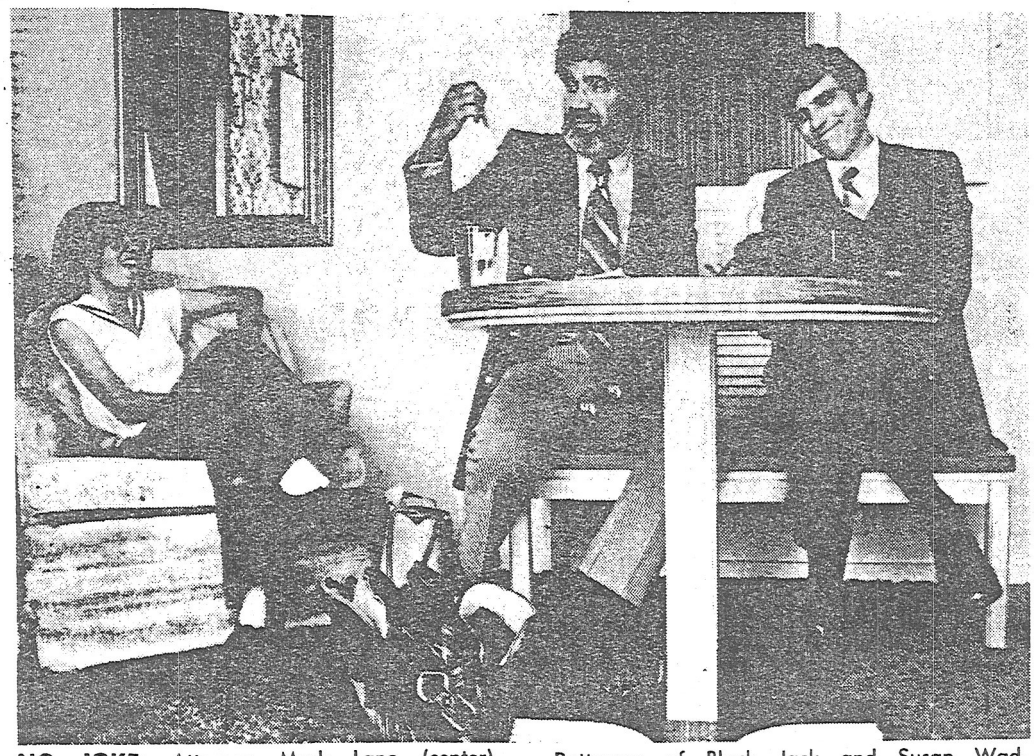
A spokesman for the committee said Monday night only that the staff is aware of Lane's contentions and that "we consider them serious. We will be investigating." Ray is expected to testify publicly before the committee later this month, the spokesman said.

U.S. Rep. Harold Sawyer, D-Mich., a member of the committee, denied Lane's contention that Ray was offered his freedom in exchange for an admission of guilt.

But he said Ray had been told that authorities in Missouri and Tennessee would be asked to consider a reduction in Ray's sentence if Sawyer was given "hard evidence that others were involved."

Sawyer defended the proposal. "Every prosecutor in the country does this at times to gain information," he said.

Such a deal is now almost impossible,



NO JOKE: Attorney Mark Lane (center) making a joke at an otherwise serious press conference here Monday. With him are Oliver Patterson of Black Jack and Susan Wadsworth, a friend of Patterson's. (Post-Dispatch Photo by Karen Elshout)

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Spy In Ray Case

Sawyer said, because Lane "has just deliberately blown it" by discussing it publicly.

The news conference was held in St. Louis at the Hilton Inn near Lambert Field. Its primary aim, Lane said, was to explain the role of Oliver Patterson, 34, of 12350 Old Halls Ferry Road, an alleged undercover agent for the committee who said he had become disenchanted with his job.

Patterson said he had once been an informer for the Federal Bureau of Investigation and had been employed for the last few months by the House special committee to spy on James Earl Ray's brother, Jerry, a friend of Patterson's for several years.

He said his duties included tape-recording telephone conversations with Jerry Ray, sifting through Ray's belongings for letters from his jailed brother — and even acquiring samples of Jerry Ray's hair.

In April, Patterson said, he appeared before the committee's investigative staff to answer questions about his undercover work. "During that testimony I was asked questions by a lawyer for the committee named Michael Eberhardt, and on several occasions I was handed written 'answers' to the questions by Conrad Baetz, a staff investigator."

Other staff members appeared to be aware of what was happening, Patterson said, but "the stenographer apparently took the answers down as my own."

Patterson said he was told by Baetz to say that "I had seen Jerry Ray carry a gun — which is not true" and "to say something nice about" J.B. Stoner, an advocate of white supremacy.

Baetz, who lives in Madison County and is a sheriff's deputy there, could not be reached for comment.

The spying continued, Patterson said, until he was told by an FBI agent and Baetz that Lane had somehow learned of the undercover work. "I was told that Lane or Ray might take retaliatory action against me or my family," he said.

Patterson said he was advised by Baetz to hold a news conference Sunday, where he was to accuse Lane of being a homosexual and contend that his under-

See RAY, Page 8

Ray

■ FROM PAGE ONE

cover work had reinforced James Earl Ray's guilt.

The conference was postponed, Patterson said, after he and Baetz learned of Pope Paul VI's death. After a meeting with Lane, Patterson said he had a change of heart and decided to "tell the whole truth about the secret operation."

Patterson said he was displeased with the job, because the committee owed him $900 and was "just going to dump everything on me — the illegal wire taps, the opening of mail, the thefts, everything. I'm willing to take a lie detector test, too," he said.

To lend credence to Patterson's story, Lane displayed an armload of tapes, said to be recordings of conversations with several persons, including Baetz and a New York Times reporter. Lane said Patterson had been instructed to "leak" false information to the Times during a St. Louis interview scheduled for Monday.

But instead of a being given a private interview, Times reporter Anthony J. Marro found himself walking into a hotel room full of news cameras and reporters. Marro pushed his way out of the room, saying that he was being used. Lane followed Marro out into the hall, shouting, "Don't you want to print the truth?"

Lane believed that the incident supported his contention that "the staff of the House committee panicked when they learned that I was aware of what was going on. So they decided to set up a secret meeting with The New York Times and discredit me."

Patterson said he knew nothing of recent reports by Russell E. Byers of Rock Hill that Byers had been offered money by two Imperial, Mo., men to arrange King's killing.

Marro, whose newspaper broke Byers' allegations, reported that Patterson "had never been reached by the Times and had never provided the paper with any information concerning the King assassination prior to Monday."

In a brief telephone interview, Marro added, "We chase a lot of leads. Some are good — some aren't. I'm going to Washington to chase a few more."

Lane said he was disturbed with his findings. An assassination buff who has written two books — "Rush to Judgment" and "Code Name Zorro" — about the murders of King and President John F. Kennedy, Lane contended that "it seems impossible for anybody to now take the House Select Committee on Assassinations seriously."

Patterson, a self-proclaimed gypsy salesman who says he has sold everything from real estate to geraniums, says he now has other matters to worry about.

Because he fears for his life, he said, he was to leave the St. Louis area Monday night. "I don't know where I'll go," he said. "But when it comes to knuckles, I think mine are going to get slapped."